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AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

PURSUING BRILLIANT WARRIORS:
THE FIRST STEP IN REFORMING ACSC

by

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Abstract

Much has been written about the future direction of Professional Military Education (PME) (Kelly, 1996 & Ware, 1996). The advancement of technology combined with the drive towards Joint Operations has created new challenges for our PME institutions. Most of the discussion centers on the technology and curricular aspects of the problem, but very little study has gone into the personnel required to transform these institutions. The author proposes that both educational and operational experts are needed in all air and space disciplines to keep Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) at the forefront of academic excellence. In order to stay relevant, ACSC has to be “present at creation”, and the first step is to involve the right people. Personnel choices are the toughest to make in the shrinking Air Force, but the educational institutions are key to our core values. The study reviews ACSC’s history of reform and compares it to other successful educational institutions that have maintained a crucial role in their professions. Using elements common to other successful institutions the author hopes to provide a road map the Air Force can use to keep ACSC vital in this changing environment.

Chapter 1

Introduction

To ensure [a] values-based Air Force, three elements—education, leadership and accountability—provide a framework to establish the strongest imprint of shared Air Force core values. In the Air Force of tomorrow, as in the Air Force of today, these stated and practiced values must be identical.

The Air Force will continue to reinforce its core values in all aspects of its education and training. The goal is to provide one hundred percent of the Total Force with core values education and training continually throughout a career.

—Global Engagement: A Vision for the 21st Century Air Force

The Air Force has recently refocused its attention inward towards the Air Force as an institution. Integrity, service before self, excellence in all we do, Gen. Fogleman's core values initiative is an attempt to emphasize the character of airmen, and stem the tide of careerism that has led many in the Air Force to become disillusioned with the institution. The three elements - education, leadership and accountability - establish the framework for instilling shared core values throughout the force. It is in the element of education where the most emphasis has been placed, but the emphasis has been focused on creating programs and courseware that instill these values in the students. This approach emphasizes the product and not the process of education. Thus our education institutions focus on the technology aspects and not on the human element which is the intent of core values in the first place.

The problem with the courseware approach in education is that it leaves out the most important aspect - people. If the “stated and practiced” values are to be “identical”, then the means are as important as the ends in education. In education the means are the people that create, update, and present the courseware. The effectiveness of the courseware is then obviously directly related to the effectiveness of the instructors responsible for the care and feeding of the courseware. When Air Force leadership neglects the means of education while extolling the ends, the institution as a whole suffers.

For the mid-career officer, Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) is the in-residence program that prepares officers for follow-on leadership roles. The mid-career officer is the critical link between senior leaders and the junior officers who operate most of the Air Forces weapon systems. Like all of the Air Force’s education institutions, ACSC has been struggling to remain relevant and achieve the ends of mid-career PME. In 1993 ACSC revised its courseware in a move by then commandant Col. John A. Warden to create an Air Campaign Course. The goal of the course is to “educate officers who can advise commanders and develop effective air campaigns for the operational level of warfare.”¹

Within the framework of ACSC and Air University as a whole, the current discussion of transforming PME has revolved around the concept of “Brilliant Warriors.” “Brilliant” refers to future warriors in the advanced technology and information age. Much has been written about formal education’s role in producing these warriors, and how Air University should change and adapt to meet the needs of the Air Force of the future. This discussion is not new for Air University and ACSC in particular. Since its inception, ACSC has been the focus of a continuing debate about what its educational objectives should be, and how

best to meet them. Much of the recent discussion has centered on the Post Cold War environment and the effects of the information revolution on modern warfare. Unfortunately, much of this debate is on the courseware and tools used in teaching, and not the institutional aspects of keeping ACSC vital during changing times.

This paper examines the institutional aspects of ACSC, in hopes of focusing some attention on the faculty required in producing “Brilliant Warriors” for the Air Force of tomorrow. A literature review of both the history and current reform discussion will demonstrate a familiar pattern of reform at ACSC. Then, to gain a broader perspective on successful reform, a comparison is made between this and other successful institutions both in the military and civilian worlds. This will be combined with current observations to make a case for increased focus on the people that make up the institution.

The basic argument is that any discussion of reforming or transforming ACSC must start with the people that make up the organization. Producing “Brilliant Warriors” for the future cannot happen by merely changing the tools and courseware used in instruction. It will require “Brilliant Warriors” on the staff as instructors to change it from a reactionary to a revolutionary institution. Air Force leadership will have to practice what it states as the value of PME by making the people investment. By avoiding the problem of acquiring talented warriors from all operator fields, and only focusing on the curriculum, dooms the institution to continuing problems remaining relevant to the warriors in the field. ACSC needs to take on the role of innovator at the operational level of airpower employment.

Notes

¹ Maj P. Mason Carpenter and Maj George T. McClain, "Air Command and Staff College Air Campaign Course: The Air Corps Tactical School Reborn," *Air Power Journal* Vol VII, no. 3(Summer 1995): 27.

Chapter 2

The Mission of ACSC

It does not seem very likely that the military will collapse and fail the nation because of its marginal knowledge of social issues. It is far more likely that the military will falter and fail the nation because of its inability to meet demands of combat.

—Brig Gen. John E. Ralph¹

Changing Nature over Time

The mission of ACSC has continually changed throughout its history. The Air Force has had difficulty precisely defining what an officer should learn while attending ACSC in residence. The difficulty in establishing a clear mission has centered primarily on two aspects that have remained with ACSC throughout its history. The first aspect is the debate concerning broad or specialized curricula and its respective value for the mid-career officer. This debate is further complicated by the second enduring aspect of the Air Force's PME system, specifically, the multitude of voices attempting to influence and change the curriculum. Lt. Cols Richard Davis and Frank Donnini point this out in a study prepared in 1991:

The capstone of Air Force PME is Air University, located at Maxwell Air Force Base. AU consists of three schools: Squadron Officer School, Air Command and Staff College, and Air War College. During the more than 40 years examined here, PME became thoroughly institutionalized. Further, the quality of professional education offered by AU was constantly

assessed and reassessed. External observers (those outside the Air Force) and internal observers (both military and civilian, assigned from within the Air Force) regularly examined the qualifications and teaching methods of the school's faculty, as well as the schools' curricula. Throughout this period, PME's purpose was the subject of ongoing discussion: whether it should provide broad or specialized instruction and whether it should address only military issues or include political and related topics. These questions remain unanswered because the Air Force has never effectively defined what it wanted its officers to know or to be.²

Since ACSC's mission was never precisely defined, continual assessments and criticisms of ACSC have changed it over time. From inception it has reacted to the strongest critics in order to adapt itself to the current environment. External critics have included all levels of oversight from Congress to senior Air Force leadership, and various review boards. Internally, ACSC has been influenced by several factors including commanders of Air University, faculty, and staff. Often changes in leadership resulted in changing and conflicting criticism. Ultimately, every aspect of ACSC, curriculum, courseware, format, length, faculty, and student selection has been the focus of review and reform with varying levels of success.

The evolution of ACSC's mission over the years has mirrored the Air Force's growth as an institution, and the national military community as a whole. Much of the criticism targeting ACSC, was not always based on actual conditions at the college, but often stimulated by outside perceptions of the U.S. military or the Air Force as institutions. Other times the college did mirror the larger military institutions: during times of neglect, reducing military budgets, and stagnant periods of military thought. Over the college's history, certain patterns appear with respect to the amount of criticism it received, and its impact as an institution within the Air Force. The following overview of ACSC's changing goals is intended to try and establish these patterns, and to try and determine

where the school is presently with respect to these patterns. For a more in-depth review the reader is directed to Lt Col Davis's and Donnini's work on the subject.³

ACSC's Mission Evolution

The changing goals of ACSC are intertwined with that of Air University as a whole. The following history is intended to focus on ACSC separately, but at times, to understand the changes, it will be necessary to include information pertaining to all of Air University.

Creation of ACSC and First Mission Statement

The original mission statement that created ACSC was really just direction for the creation of Air University which would consist of three schools. On 19 November 1945 the Army established the Army Air Forces School at Maxwell. This was later incorporated into an Army Air Forces Regulation (AAFR) 20-61, and on recommendation of the Gerow board the school was renamed Air University. It was to consist of the three schools named Air Tactical School (later renamed Squadron Officer School), Air Command and Staff School (later renamed ACSC), and the Air War College.⁴ Air University opened on 3 September 1946 with little more than guidance that it would consist of three schools.

The mission of the schools was defined in informal guidance from the leaders of the AAF to Gen. Fairchild, the first commander of Air University. One such example of informal guidance was from Gen. Carl A. Spaatz commander of AAF at the time:

The purpose of the institution is to provide postgraduate education for Air Force officers in order to improve their professional capabilities and knowledge, to widen their vision and insure forward-thinking and adequate leadership for Air Forces, both in peace and war.⁵

Using other such inputs Gen. Fairchild formulated his concepts for the schools. His vision for the schools was best summed up when he said that “this is not a post-war school system—it is a pre-war school system!” He outlined this in his letter of welcome to the first class of students:

Our mission calls for the discarding of traditionalism and rigidity of thought and doctrine. Our whole thinking must be fresh, original, and oriented on the future. The dividing line here between teaching and learning will be nebulous indeed. The maximum contribution of every one of us is demanded, to the end that the Air University may produce a corps of officers and establish a system of concepts and doctrine adequate to the needs of the Army Air Forces in fulfilling its obligations to our nation.⁶

Within the framework of Air University, ACSC’s role has always been to educate intermediate officers. This however has not always led to a clear mission statement for ACSC, and over the years the curriculum has varied from specialized to broad areas of study. After the initial groundwork by Gen. Fairchild to establish a forward-looking school, the Korean War interrupted its growth. Due to mobilization for the war the course was reduced from ten to five months. The curriculum moved towards specialized training due to the length of the course.

Cold War Influences

Following the Korean War, the evolving Cold War had the biggest affect on ACSC. The school again became a 10-month course, but the emphasis shifted away from Gen. Fairchild’s view of a forward-looking curriculum to an emphasis on the sciences and specialization. The cold war event that directly influenced this trend was the launch of Sputnik in October 1957.

The third phase began with the Department of Defense Reorganization Act in 1958 and was initially colored by the post-Sputnik call for more engineers and scientists. In this setting, the technical problems

accompanying the Air Forces change from bombers to missiles became a key concern of the Power board, the eighth major Air Force conference addressing educational requirements. Chaired in November 1959 by Gen. Thomas S. Power, then commander in chief of the Strategic Air Command (SAC), this board felt that expanded and better-tailored engineering and scientific studies were important Air Force goals.⁷

The next major influence on the mission and goals of ACSC was the conflict in Southeast Asia. The war in Vietnam again forced reductions in attendance at ACSC, and an overall lowering of emphasis on PME. Additionally, the curriculum shifted to an emphasis on current events. A review board in 1973, chaired by Maj. Gen. Lawrence S. Lightner, concluded that the role of history be reduced at PME in order to include more current events. And, that faculty should not be given the time to pursue individual research in order to concentrate on developing the curriculum and lectures.⁸

Post Vietnam War

Following the Vietnam War, ACSC became the focus of increased emphasis and criticism due to the perceived nature of the military's effort in the conflict. Again this led to redefining the ACSC mission. The Committee on Excellence in Education in 1975 made recommendations in an effort to change the focus of PME following the War. They said mid-level PME should focus on "the achievement of professional competence and expertise in the command doctrine, staff and operations of their particular Service."⁹ This critique began a trend at ACSC towards a curriculum of leadership and management.

Initially the trend was a management approach, but by the early to mid 80's the curriculum had shifted to a professional leadership flavor.

During the eighties, ACSC—like AWC and SOS—altered its curriculum to produce professional leaders knowledgeable in the areas of war fighting and joint operations. Thus, the curriculum emphasized warfare studies,

including force employment, strategy, and doctrine phases as well as command, leadership, and resource management.¹⁰

This shift during the Reagan era followed the failed DESERT ONE mission in Iran. The emphasis on joint operations was now becoming the focus, along with increasing military budgets.

Desert Storm And Beyond

The mission of ACSC remained fairly constant during the eighties. The next major change occurred post Desert Storm. Col. John Warden initiated a move to rekindle the original ideas set forth in the Air Corps Tactical School (ACTS). He felt that the Air Force needed to create an environment where air planners of the future could develop the skills necessary to use air power effectively in the next conflict.

The primary objective of this course was to educate and develop officers who will represent air power as advisors to a war-fighting commander in chief and who one day will lead, maintain, and continue to provide our nation with the most effective air force on the globe. To accomplish this end, the Air Campaign Course sought to educate future air campaign planners and promote freethinking and vision in the field of air and space power employment.¹¹

Using Col. Warden's concept of an Air Campaign the course is intended to educate mid-career officers in the art of operational planning within the joint framework. Although the course targets the operational level, it includes courses in the strategic context with which a planner will have to operate. Using ACTS as its guiding foundation, ACSC has attempted to return to its original roots laid out by Gen. Fairchild.

ASCS Present Mission Statement

A world-class team educating mid-career officers to lead in developing, advancing, and applying air and space power across the spectrum of service, joint, and combined military operations.

Observations on ACSC's Mission

ACSC has evolved and adapted over time, attempting to meet the Air Forces needs for mid-career officer education. The changes in many ways have mirrored both the Air Force's growth as an institution, and the country's perceptions and expectations of the military. At times ACSC has performed well, and its ability to adapt to the needs of the Air Force is a credit to the leadership and faculty over the years.

Evidently, all of the changes to ACSC's mission and curriculum have not had an adverse effect on the school's ability to fulfill its role as the Air Force's intermediate professional school for officers. Rather, the adaptability of ACSC's mission and course of study has allowed Air Force officers to benefit from contemporary theories of education and prepare themselves for service in a constantly changing environment.¹²

Unfortunately, these successes have not prevented periods of neglect resulting in stagnation of its curriculum and weakening of its relevance to the Air Force. As seen in the brief history of its mission, ACSC has followed some recurring trends. It appears that ACSC and Air University get the most attention following a major conflict, then slowly as time passes, the interest dissipates and the school maintains the status quo until the next conflict. This trend began from the school's inception. Following World War II the school was created and Gen. Fairchild set lofty goals, but the Korean War interrupted these plans. The school was reduced, and the post war environment led to a different type of institution. This trend was repeated during the Vietnam War, and most recently at the end of the Cold War / Desert Storm. The result of these recurring trends is that the impact the school has within the institution is at its lowest prior to and during each of the major conflicts we have faced. Then after the experience in the conflict, ACSC is revitalized based on the lessons learned in the conflict. This pattern does not reflect the

“pre-war” school that Gen. Fairchild proposed at its inception. In fact, it better resembles the “post-war” school that Gen. Fairchild wanted to guard against. Because of this ACSC has never attained the institutional status within the Air Force that its creators intended.

Col. Warden’s most recent changes appear to be an attempt to recapture these roots. ACSC now has come full circle in curriculum. The question then arises, is the school now in a position to achieve its original charter? Will it become the “pre-war” school that both Gen. Fairchild and Col. Warden intended it to be? Or, will it fall back into the familiar trend of its history?

Notes

¹ Quoted in Lt Col Richard L. Davis and Lt Col Frank P. Donnini, *Professional Military Education for Air Force Officers: Comments and Criticisms* (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, June 1991), 25.

² Ibid., xiii.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁸ Maj. Gen. Lawrence S. Lightner, *Review of Air War College and Air Command and Staff College* (Maxwell AFB, Ala: Air University, March 1973), 32-33.

⁹ DOD Committee on Excellence in Education, *The Intermediate Level Staff Colleges: Conclusions and Initiatives* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1 December 1976), 1.

¹⁰ Davis and Donnini, 41.

¹¹ Maj P. Mason Carpenter and Maj George T. McClain, “Air Command and Staff College Air Campaign Course: The Air Corps Tactical School Reborn,” *Air Power Journal* Vol VII, no. 3(summer 1995): 31.

¹² Davis and Donnini, 41.

Chapter 3

Is ACSC Meeting Its Goals?

Nothing in education is so astonishing as the amount of ignorance it accumulates in the form of inert facts.

—Henry Adams

In attempting to assess goal accomplishment at ACSC, two major problems inhibit any attempt to quantify the school's success. The first is the varied interpretation of what the goals are for ACSC, as shown in the previous chapter. Second, the measures used within the school represent the hard work of faculty to accomplish the task given with the resources available. This may not, however, represent what ACSC is doing for the larger institution of the Air Force. Therefore, it is important to balance both internal and external assessments with the larger institutional view. In the end, any assessment will be subjective, and will be most influenced by the reader's own belief as to the mission of ACSC.

For the purposes of this paper, the mission of ACSC will be that offered by Gen. Fairchild at its inception, a "pre-war" institution for the mid career officer. The concept of forward thinking and ACSC's impact on the Air Force as a whole at the operational level of war will be the subject matter of this approach. This was chosen because it is the intended goal of Col. Warden's Air Campaign Course, and because of the author's belief that this is the correct goal for mid-level PME.

Critiques of ACSC

Many recent critiques of ACSC resemble critiques throughout ACSC's existence. Similar critiques about the curriculum being too broad, or too specific; the faculty makeup and qualification; leadership versus management approach, remain with ACSC to today. Unfortunately, the Air Campaign course has not reduced these critiques or eliminated these problems. Mainly, this is because the school remains reactive rather than proactive in its approach to education. Over time this approach leads to inevitable tradeoffs that water down the curricula to the lowest common denominator. Col. Dennis M. Drew pointed this out in an article where he made some observations about his career at Air University:

Although Curricula often have changed, there have been identifiable trends. In broad terms, ACSC and AWC have divided their curricula (the proportions have varied) between those subjects most closely related to airpower employment (theory, doctrine, strategy, history, etc.) and those subjects more closely related to the management of a peacetime Air Force (planning programming, budgeting, personnel management, etc.). Both areas are worthy of study, and each could profitably fill a rigorous, yearlong curriculum. Taken together, however, the split curricula gave credence to the most oft-mentioned criticism of both schools (i.e., curricula a mile wide and an inch deep). There simply is not enough time to explore both areas in depth.¹

What was a revolutionary idea when Col. Warden introduced the new course has now begun to slowly follow the school's previous pattern of stagnating and falling behind the air campaigners in the field. The result is a view described by Lt. Col. Richard L. Davis in *The Case for Officer Professional Military Education, A View From the Trenches*:

Meanwhile, officers persist in their perception that selection for intermediate and senior service schools in residence is good, but that actual attendance confers no real benefit aside from encouraging collegiality among select peers. Attendance in residence is a necessary evil, largely incidental to the concerns of the real world. Taken together with the

utilitarian view of nonresident programs, we can perhaps conclude that Air Force officers view PME only as a step toward promotion. Rarely do they acknowledge its intended function—a means of enhancing professional competence.²

The reasons for this view are varied, and to fully understand this perception, one must understand the impact ACSC has within the Air Force and the larger joint force.

ACSC's Impact on the Air Force

The role ACSC plays in the larger institution of the Air Force is itself a critique of ACSC and its mission as a “pre-war” and forward thinking school. The impact ACSC has on the operational level of war and its relevance to the campaign planners in the Air Force reveal much about its mission accomplishment. ACSC's role in operational level airpower thought, doctrine development, air campaign planning, and faculty contribution to the field needs to be addressed.

In the area of airpower thought, ACSC has had a limited impact. Or at least, it has not been fulfilling its role to the satisfaction of both Air Force and Air University leadership. To arrive at this conclusion one must look around ACSC and Air University and wonder why different organizations have been created to do similar, if not the same things, ACSC was intended to do. The best example of this is the School of Advanced Airpower Studies (SAAS). Although administratively aligned with ACSC, it is really a separate school. Compare the following stated mission of SAAS to that of ACSC:

The mission of SAAS is to develop professional officers educated in airpower theory, doctrine, planning, and execution to become the air strategists of the future. SAAS achieves this mission through a unique educational process that blends operational expertise and scholarship in an environment that fosters the creation, evaluation, and refinement of ideas. The goal is thus twofold: to educate and to generate ideas on the employment of airpower in peace and war.³

The similarity is obvious. One has to wonder if ACSC is meeting its goals, why then do select students need an additional year to achieve the same mission. Obviously, this is an over simplification of the two schools, but the question it raises deserves consideration. Is it too difficult to achieve these goals within the one-year framework because of the time available combined with varied student backgrounds and education levels? Or is it that ACSC as a school is unable to achieve this goal? Either way it appears that both Gen. Fairchild's and Col. Warden's goal of creating a ACTS type school is perceived to be residing elsewhere as Gen. Fogleman points out in his forward to *The Paths of Heaven, The Evolution of Airpower Theory*:

The contributors, all from the School of Advanced Airpower Studies (SAAS) at Maxwell AFB, Alabama, are the most qualified experts in the world to tackle this subject. As the home of the only graduate-level program devoted to airpower and as the successor to the Air Corps Tactical School, SAAS boasts students and faculty who are helping build the airpower theories of the future.⁴

This perception is in a large part fueled by the lack of contribution ACSC makes in advancing airpower thought at the operational level. This trend has grown with the development of such organizations as SAAS, the Doctrine Center, and the battle labs. Increasingly, the role of innovator has been relinquished to other institutions resulting in the continuation of the view that "PME institutions have not developed a reputation as hotbeds of new ideas. On the contrary, critics regard them as defenders of the status quo or bastions of esoteric theory having little relevance to the "real" world of military operations."⁵

This perception becomes reality within the framework of the "air campaign." The course material trails the concepts in use throughout the Combat Air Forces (CAF). At

present most of the material and instruction is based on Col. Warden's input to the course in 1993. The school is in the position of trying to keep up with the CAF, versus being the "forward thinking" school as intended. For those readers who have previously been involved with air planning duties, did you ever want to update yourself with the new ideas coming out of ACSC? Probably not, and unfortunately, most people who have been directly involved with "air campaign" planning do not return to instruct. This results in student critiques similar to what Maj. Brenda Fay Roth found in a recent study: "written comments on open-ended questions were very critical of military faculty members overall. One of the most frequent comments on the open-ended portion of the questionnaire was that faculty members were not qualified to teach the subject matter."⁶

Similarly, ACSC's impact within the joint arena is characterized much the same way. The faculty as a whole lacks the joint experience to be credible airpower advocates within the joint community. According to the 1997 Joint Accreditation Finding:

Faculty members are broadly perceived as lacking sufficient joint and operational experience to serve as credible instructors or role models for joint matters. This shortfall has a strong negative impact on ACSC's ability to develop quality joint perspectives and attitudes in its students.⁷

As a result, instead of influencing thought at the operational level, the school is constantly trying to keep up. ACSC does not possess the expertise to make it the forward thinking school it is intended to be. Ultimately, the school is positioned to repeat the course demonstrated throughout its history, of maintaining the status quo until the next major conflict forces the Air Force to change the curricula.

Notes

¹ Col Dennis M. Drew, "Educating Air Force Officers, Observations after 20 Years at Air University," *Airpower Journal*, Vol XI, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 40.

Notes

² Lt Col Richard L. Davis, "The Case for Officer Professional Military Education, A View from the Trenches," *Air Power Journal* Vol III, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 35.

³ Col Phillip S. Meilinger, ed., *The Paths of Heaven, The Evolution of Airpower Theory*, (Maxwell AFB, Ala, Air University Press, 1997), ix.

⁴ Ibid., vii.

⁵ Lt Col Richard L. Davis and Lt Col Frank P. Donnini, *Professional Military Education for Air Force Officers: Comments and Criticisms* (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, June 1991), 99.

⁶ Brenda Fay Roth, "Student Outcomes Assessment of Air Command and Staff College: An Evaluative Study," (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1996), 92.

⁷ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Report of Accreditation, of the Air Command and Staff College Resident Program*, (Washington D.C., 5-9 May 1997), 3.

Chapter 4

Reform

If we don't change direction soon, we'll end up where we're going.

—Chinese Proverb

ACSC has been the focus of reformers to varying degrees throughout its history. As discussed earlier this has led to varying mission statements and changing goals for the school. The success of the reforms in the past have been questionable based on the continuing criticisms, and one wonders if the current trends will lead to the type of institution the Air Force needs in the future.

Previous Attempts at Reform

Reforms throughout ACSC's history can be broadly grouped into three categories: curricular, format, and faculty. The curriculum reforms have been the most prevalent during the history of ACSC. Both the internal and external criticisms that led to changing mission statements were consistently accompanied with changing curricula. As Davis and Donnini pointed out in their study, this may not have been always successful:

Like the definition, goals, and purpose of PME, the curriculum and mission of AU's schools—Air War College, Air Command and Staff College, and Squadron Officer School—underwent distinct changes. Indeed, an examination of each school's curriculum and mission statement reveals that changes in the former were directly related to changes in the latter...Certainly, the evolutionary nature of the PME curriculum is a

logical subject for inquiry because the Air Force invests a great deal of time and effort and commits substantial resources to reviewing curricula and making appropriate changes. However, some questions remain as to whether AU is changing the right subject areas and whether such change is advancing the mission of its schools.¹

Col. Drew in his observation goes as far as to say that the rapidly changing curricula has actually aggravated the situation at ACSC:

Over the entire history of Air University, there has never been a broad, let alone lasting, consensus about the proper curricula for ACSC and AWC. Guidance and advice from the most senior command level, congressional committees, boards of visitors, and special panels have often been nebulous, conflicting, or both. Lack of lasting consensus led ACSC and AWC to implement nine major shifts in curricula emphasis—from the time of their founding through the mid-1990s. Even more interesting, the shifts at ACSC and AWC did not mesh with each other, either in terms of timing or areas of emphasis. Such uncoordinated changes suggest curricula more influenced by current whim than by a well-thought-out education doctrine. Frequent injection of “hot topics” (some would call them fads) into already crowded and rapidly changing curricula further complicates the situation.²

At best curricula attempts at change have had varying success, and many times this approach alone has adversely affected the school. Unfortunately, these curricula changes were often to be accompanied with other reforms, but many times the curricula change was the only one implemented.

Teaching methods or format has also been the target of various reforms. The argument has usually centered on the balance of lectures with seminar instruction. Advocates of the lecture format emphasize the subject matter expertise required to instruct, where the critics attack the passive nature of this format. To create a more active nature of learning many have favored the seminar approach, which allows for the students to participate in problem solving.

Reforms in the format have not always been in step with the consistently changing curricula. Specifically, the seminar approach combined with new curricula has led to

situations where the instructor has not been fully qualified to teach in this format.

Critiques like:

Discussion leaders with scant knowledge of subjects they ‘teach’....As a result, students claim they learn more from one another than from lectures. This has its advantages, but more often than not discussion descends to the level of lowest common denominator.³

The problems with this format have been complicated by the use of “plowbacks” in the seminar format. “Plowbacks” are instructors who completed the course then remained to teach. As Davis and Donnini found:

Not everyone, however, agreed that seminars were valuable, particularly those led by plowbacks and students. Although General Fairchild envisioned seminars as good environments for problem solving, commentators observed that they can easily degenerate into bull sessions—exchanges of ignorance, misinformation, or irrelevant material. Furthermore, the seminar too often becomes a “haven for the unprepared—both students and faculty.”⁴

The net result of the continuing tinkering with the curricula and format has not always led to successful reform. Many times this has been the result of not combining these reforms with changes in the third area of reform, namely faculty makeup.

Critiques of the faculty have plagued ACSC from its inception. However, faculty reform has been the most difficult to make, and in many cases the reform least attempted. Gen. Fairchild understood the problems AU schools would face when he said instructors should be “pretty well rounded and experienced” but the problem would be “everybody else will want [these people] for almost any job, it is going to be like pulling teeth to get the sort of men you will want.”⁵ Unfortunately, critiques of the faculty have remained fairly consistent over the years, with varying results during the periods when reform was being attempted. Usually the problem revolves around the Air Force’s willingness to

make the people investment necessary when there are competing needs. As Davis and Donnini pointed out:

As the Korean War wound down, AU resumed yearlong ACSC and AWC courses but continued to have problems with recruiting and keeping good faculty. This difficulty was largely due to Air Force efforts to build and maintain an operational force of 137 wings. Faculty tours rarely reached the desired three-year length, a problem even AU's efforts at selective manning failed to solve.⁶

Similar comments about faculty prevail over history. Additionally, the prestige of being on faculty added to the faculty problems:

The recruitment problem tended to compound itself: as AU continued to have difficulty in attracting good faculty members, an appointment to AU became less appealing. Indeed, by 1959 knowledge of poor promotions among the AWC and ACSC faculties was widespread.⁷

These problems continue to plague ACSC today. As a recent study of student critiques completed by an ACSC staff member found:

Students criticized the military faculty members for not being qualified to teach. In other words, respondents did not believe that military faculty members were 'subject matter' experts. It is difficult to find people throughout the military that are both qualified to teach and who volunteer to come to ACSC to be on faculty.⁸

This also points out that much of the problem has focused on the military faculty, not the civilian faculty.

Much of the difficulty in effective reform over the years has originated in the critiques of both external sources, and the views of various AU leaders. An example of these detracting views is found in the 1973 Lightner board, where they contended that the requirement of:

Faculty members [to] be active researchers and contributors to professional military knowledge is impractical and inconsistent with reality...because of [the inordinate amount of time spent on] duties in planning, instructing, seminar leading, guiding, and counseling.⁹

This view has been pervasive at times during AU's history, resulting in lackadaisical attitude towards the need for quality instructors. Col. Drew relates his experience, "over the years, two school commandants told me that highly qualified faculty members were unimportant because students teach themselves."¹⁰ These views have invariably led to periods where the curricula stagnated because instructors weren't expected to be players at the operational level of military thought, thus enabling them to keep the curricula current.

It would be unfair, however, to characterize all reforms as failures. Many AU and ACSC leaders have made considerable effort in this area over the years. As a recent article in the *Airpower Journal* points out, the effort made following the Vietnam War made considerable strides in tackling many of the difficult problems facing AU. As the authors point out:

That a persistent struggle to regain respect in the PME arena through major curriculum overhauls, innovative faculty acquisition methods, and new student-selection procedures eventually returned AU to its previous status as one of the premier military education institutions in the world.¹¹

Many similar efforts are under way today at ACSC. Unfortunately, most of the same problems still face ACSC, and it is unclear what the future holds for the school.

The Future

ACSC faces many challenges as it moves into the 21st century. The pressures to transform the institution may be more pressing now than any time in its history. The era of reducing military budgets, the drive to joint operations, and the evolving revolution in military affairs all combine to create an environment in which the Air Force needs ACSC to be the "forward thinking school" it was intended to be.

The military and the Air Force will continue to decrease in size. As this happens, pressure on ACSC to produce value added in attendance will increase. This was pointed out in the article *Professional Military Education in 2020*:

[One] reason the PME system must change is to respond to future fiscal constraints. Military budgets, as a percentage of real gross national product (GNP), will continue to get smaller in the future. In particular, fiscal constraints will continue to impact the number of military members who will attend or enroll in PME.¹²

One wonders if ACSC is unable to stay relevant and on the leading edge of the operational level of airpower application, how long it will be before the “bean counters” begin to question its existence. Or might the in-residence programs be replaced with a distance learning approach that would deprive officers the opportunity to come together in an environment that Gen. Fairchild thought was critical to advancing airpower thought.

The increasing joint nature of warfare will require ACSC to be an innovative voice for airpower in the future. The US will undoubtedly fight future conflicts in a joint manner.

Congressman Ike Skelton, a long time proponent of joint education points out:

These next few years for those in the military will be difficult ones nonetheless. As we reduce the size of the services, professional military education should not be forced to take its ‘fair share’ of the cuts. The fact is that smaller forces will have to be more capable forces. That means continued high levels of training and efforts to improve professional military education. Doing business in a joint fashion will become even more necessary.¹³

Some suggest, as Robert Kupiszewski, moving to joint PME institutions entirely.¹⁴

Whether this comes to pass, it becomes obvious that there is a need for the Air Force to have a strong voice in joint education and doctrine. Gen. Fogleman, at a Doctrine Center Seminar at Maxwell, described the need for this voice to be competent and convincing:

Doctrine and doctrinal discussions are becoming more important in the United States as we see the emergence of true joint doctrine. The current

chairman of the Joint Chiefs (Gen. John M. Shalikashvili, U.S. Army) has taken the approach that joint doctrine will flow from service doctrine. Therefore, we services have to have our act together; otherwise, we can't expect to have our views and the full contribution of our service felt in the joint arena.¹⁵

Failure to heed these warnings could doom both ACSC and the Air Force to irrelevancy in the changing nature of US military warfare.

The changing conflict environment will also force reform at ACSC. Many are now proposing a revolution in military affairs is under way. Confirming such a revolution is more easily done in the study of history, than at present. However, there is strong evidence that information technologies are changing the nature of conflict forever. Ervin J. Rokke points out this effect on warfare:

Perhaps no single factor has much potential as the information explosion for changing the way in which military organizations function, both during peace and in war. The widespread adoption of information technologies in the latter part of this century has set the stage for a social transformation of historic magnitude by making unprecedented amounts of information instantaneously available in easy to use forms at ever-diminishing cost. The emerging information highway, which extends from earth to geosynchronous orbit, will certainly alter society, to say nothing of conflict.¹⁶

The Toffler's characterize it as "third wave" warfare in their book *War and Anti-War: Survival at the Dawn of the 21st Century*.¹⁷ No matter how it is described, the changes are unmistakable.

The Air Force will need its PME, and specifically ACSC, to become havens for this change that will link tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war as never seen before. The early 21st century will be as revolutionary a time for airpower as was the time it began its journey at ACTS all those years ago. Is ACSC ready for this challenge? Some believe not. As Ervin Rokke also pointed out in his call for change:

The issue is straightforward: either the war colleges become agents for change within the individual services and joint arena or they become anachronisms. Whatever the nature of academic politics, the downside is irrelevancy at best and demise at worst.¹⁸

The path ahead will not be easy, but, as Steven H. Kenny emphasizes, it is critical that the Air Force's PME system play a pivotal role:

We must stress the critical role of PME as a haven for heretical ideas in a revolutionary period. PME institutions are, arguably, the only venue in the military in which people can challenge accepted practices and theories without damaging daily operations. In a revolutionary time, our only recourse will be to jettison some of these accepted practices and theories and replace them with ideas that have no precedent. PME institutions must be the bastions of independent-even iconoclastic-thought, where we can generate such ideas and work them into military mainstream.¹⁹

ACSC's contribution will be critical for the Air Force. Placed at the mid-career level, it like no other PME, can harness the capabilities of the young officers at the top of their tactical fields, to redefine the application of airpower in the future.

Notes

¹ Lt Col Richard L. Davis and Lt Col Frank P. Donnini, *Professional Military Education for Air Force Officers: Comments and Criticisms* (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, June 1991), 35.

² Col Dennis M. Drew, "Educating Air Force Officers, Observations after 20 Years at Air University," *Airpower Journal*, Vol XI, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 40.

³ Maureen Mylander, "Graduate School for the Generals," *Washington Monthly*, October 1974, 47-48.

⁴ Davis and Donnini, 78.

⁵ Ibid., 52.

⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁸ Brenda Fay Roth, "Student Outcomes Assessment of Air Command and Staff College: An Evaluative Study," (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1996), 188.

⁹ *Report of the Board of Visitors* (BOV 39) (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University, 1983), 2.

¹⁰ Drew, 42.

¹¹ Jerome A. Ennels and Wesley P. Newton, "Air University Recovers from Vietnam and Regains Respect," *Airpower Journal*, Vol XI, no.4 (Winter 1997): 61.

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¹² A Spacecast 2020 White Paper, "Professional Military Education in 2020," *Air Power Journal*, no.2 (Summer 1995): 5.

¹³ U.S. Congressman Ike Skelton, "JPME Are We There Yet," *Military Review* (May 1992), 9.

¹⁴ Robert B Kupiszewski, "Joint Education for the 21st Century," *Joint Force Quarterly* no. 7 (Spring 1995): 72-76.

¹⁵ Gen Ronald R. Fogleman, chief of staff, US Air Force, *Aerospace Doctrine—More Than Just A Theory*, address to the Air Force Doctrine Seminar, Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., April 30, 1996.

¹⁶ Lt Gen Ervin J. Rokke, "Military Education for the New Age," *Joint Force Quarterly* no. 9 (Autumn 1995): 19.

¹⁷ Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War: Survival at the Dawn of the 21st Century*. (Toronto: Little, Brown & Company, 1993)

¹⁸ Rokke, 18.

¹⁹ Steven H. Kenney, "Professional Military Education and the Emerging Revolution in Military Affairs," *Airpower Journal*, Vol X, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 64.

Chapter 5

An Old Road and a New Conviction

Men make history, and not the other way around. In periods where there is no leadership, society stands still. Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better.

—Harry S. Truman

The difficult job of preparing ACSC for the future must now be undertaken. But, it will require a broader approach than focusing on the internal elements of curriculum, format, and faculty alone. As the past has proven, this approach has not solved some of the problems plaguing ACSC. Specifically, the school appears unable to internally solve the problem of faculty recruitment.

One avenue to gain perspective on this question is to compare ACSC's approach to other successful institutions both in the civilian and military worlds. Many other institutions have flourished in their fields both in and out of the military. By looking at how they are able to continue to thrive in changing environments, we might learn how to achieve the consensus necessary to effect real and beneficial changes at ACSC. Some, like Ervin J. Rokke, suggest that "PME institutions must assume the role played by first class research universities."¹ If that's the case, then what role, and how do they remain first class?

Keys to Success

Civilian institutions grapple with many of the same problems as military colleges. A review of the literature on research universities reveals some common themes that make up a first class institution. All these themes revolve around the human element and not curricula or format elements. Three areas in particular bear directly on the discussion of transforming ACSC. They are: 1) quality faculty who remain active in advancing knowledge in the field; 2) the coalition between student, faculty, and the profession; 3) the value given it by professionals in the field. Nannerl O. Keohane summed up these qualities of first class research universities, which he calls hybrid, in *The Mission of the Research University*:

Let me broach a core definition based upon this hybrid model. The modern Research University is a company of scholars engaged in discovering and sharing knowledge, with a responsibility to see that such knowledge is used to improve the human condition.²

The term “human condition” is a bit broad for this discussion, but by substituting “profession” or “national security”, the mission statement for research universities is quite clear. What is interesting to note is that Gen. Fairchild saw the mission very much the same way:

Our whole thinking must be fresh, original, and oriented on the future. The dividing line here between teaching and learning will be nebulous indeed. The maximum contribution of every one of us is demanded, to the end that the Air University may produce a corps of officers and establish a system of concepts and doctrine adequate to the needs of the Army Air Forces in fulfilling its obligations to our nation.³

When comparing the mission of ACSC today we find the goal is “educating”, so that the students can go out and contribute to air and space power. Notably the line has been drawn between teaching and learning.

Civilian institutions also recognize the need for the faculty to be experts in their fields, and continue to contribute to knowledge in the profession. When questions of curricula arise, the leveraging element is the faculty:

The *raison-d'état* of a professional school is not easily found in course content. On the contrary, the curriculum reflects the faculty's interpretation of the school's missions.⁴

By staying current in research, faculties bring a breath of freshness to the academic arena. Additionally, it creates credibility with the students when instructors are actively involved with the subjects they teach. Nannerl O. Keohane emphasizes this point:

Classroom presentations are enriched by work in the library or the laboratory, which keeps knowledge fresh and pertinent and protects the undergraduates from yellowing pages of brilliant lectures increasingly out of touch with developments in the field.⁵

As critical as this is to the civilian institutions, it is doubly important in military colleges due to the rapidly changing nature of conflict.

Faculty improvements alone will not achieve adequate reform without broader support from the profession. What civilian universities have found is that it requires a coalition forming between faculties, administration leaders, and close ties with the profession they serve. Faculties build trust within this coalition by demonstrating the capability to "reinvent" themselves in a way that benefits the profession. Leaders in both the administration and the profession take the necessary steps to support the institution. Donald Kennedy explains the need for institutions to build these coalitions if they are to survive over the long run:

Why will the institutions that develop these coalitions-those that ask hard questions like these and then behave as though they believed their own answers-be the ones that succeed? First I am convinced that the new economic constraints will be even harsher and more permanent than we now imagine. Second, I believe that although public regard for universities

is still high, there are powerful expectations that these institutions must change-like others in our society. Business as usual will, if these beliefs are correct, be out of the question. The institutions that make the hard choices, that are willing to redefine what is fundamentally important, will eventually distance themselves from the rest, even if they do not take the early lead.⁶

What is apparent in successful civilian research universities is that they are valued in their professions as contributors to the field. Both the university and the profession gain in this relationship. This concept relates well to what the ideal environment should be at military professional schools. But, as the previous discussion about ACSC has shown, this has not always been the case. Like some civilian universities, a few military schools have been able to utilize these three elements in creating similar environments.

Success Stories

Undoubtedly, ACTS was the first Air Force institution that exhibited these keys for success in a military school.

During its short lifetime, ACTS produced an effective professional military education system and forged an integrated body of concepts for the employment of air power which remains relevant today.⁷

These pioneers were able to mold the fledging concept of airpower into a viable vision of how it should be used in the next war. All three elements previously discussed were present at ACTS. The faculty was the brightest in the field, and many went on to be the most senior leaders in our Air Force.⁸ They were deeply involved, if not solely responsible, for most of the operational doctrine developed. The relationship of the school to the profession of airpower was indeed close. And all of the senior leaders supported its work because of their conviction of its value to their profession. Ultimately

their role was critical to the development of airpower, and they were one of the few institutions that were actually able to attain the title of a “pre-war” school.

Today many of the same attributes of ACTS can be found in a school that operates at the tactical level for the Air Force. The USAF Weapons School exhibits all the elements of successful institutions and its impact throughout the Air Force at the tactical level is unmistakable. Although much narrower in focus, the same elements have led to success for this institution. Instructors who have excelled from all operator fields in the CAF are recruited to instruct and advance the core competencies of the Air Force in preparation for the next war. The school’s influence extends throughout the CAF, and the instructors regularly attend conferences, publish articles, and are primary contributors to tactical level doctrine. The coalition between the school and the value to the profession can best be seen in its rapid growth from a fighter-only school, to a school now consisting of almost every major weapon system, as well as other critical functions such as Intelligence, Space, Command and Control, and Combat Search and rescue.

Obviously these two successful Air Force schools have incorporated these elements of successful civilian universities to their benefit. The question now is can ACSC do the same?

Notes

¹ Lt Gen Ervin J. Rokke, “Military Education for the New Age,” *Joint Force Quarterly* no. 9 (Autumn 1995): 23.

² Nannerl O. Keohane, “The Mission of the Research University” in *The Research University in a Time of Discontent*, ed. Jonathan R. Cole, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 155.

³ Lt Col Richard L. Davis and Lt Col Frank P. Donnini, *Professional Military Education for Air Force Officers: Comments and Criticisms* (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, June 1991), 29.

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⁴ Patrick F. Ford and Lewis B. Mayhew, *Reform in Graduate and Professional Education* (Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1974), 19.

⁵ Keohane, 157.

⁶ Donald Kennedy, "Making Choices in the Research University" in *The Research University in a Time of Discontent*, ed. Jonathan R. Cole, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 113.

⁷ H. Dwight Griffin et al., *Air Corps Tactical School: The Untold Story*. (Air Command and Staff College, 1995): 8.

⁸ Ibid., 7.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

Leaders must give thought to how human talent and energy are handled in the systems over which they preside. The quality of the educational system has much to do with the society's capacity for renewal. In organizations, the concern for human resources starts with recruitment and involves the selective movement of people in and out of the organization. Many an organization has gone downhill because good people drift away, just as many a country town has lost vitality from the continued emigration of its most energetic young people.

—John W. Gardner¹

Transforming ACSC and developing the “Brilliant Warriors” required to lead the Air Force into the next century will take an institutional change in the way the Air Force values mid-career officer training. As we have seen, by ignoring the human element keys to success in addressing change at ACSC, the school becomes something less than a first class university. We need to energize our military faculty - in short by pursuing today's brilliant warriors to instruct those of tomorrow. It will require all levels of leadership in the profession. This is the only way that we can build the coalition within the Air Force that will enable ACSC to become a true innovator at the operational level.

Unfortunately, it appears that ACSC and PME in general may be on the verge of repeating the cycle of being least influential just prior to the next conflict. By avoiding the human element we risk continuing this cycle of influence. Most of the current discussion of reform centers on curricula and format, as addressed in Lt. Gen. Jay W. Kelly's article,

*Brilliant Warriors.*² Although important elements, if ACSC is truly to become a first class university, then it must follow the example set by other successful professional schools. If not, then we will continue to see the effects of neglecting the military faculty, as highlighted by Lewis Ware:

When the inability of the personnel system to identify and assign competent officers to faculty positions in a prompt way is sometimes excused as administratively unfeasible, a college suffers.³

The first step must be to energize the faculty in embracing a wider mission than “educating.” Specifically, ACSC needs to combine both academic and operational expertise in all warrior specialties. We cannot let entire sections of our war fighting capability not be represented at ACSC, as is the case in many air and space operator fields. Airpower fields such as fighter/bomber pilots, and space, are virtually non-existent on staff. The faculty will be integral to the process, not program oriented school, that will enable it to change from within. This approach will require more of these instructors both in and out of the classroom. By interjecting more experts into the classroom, the lowest common denominator approach can be avoided. Out of the classroom they will need to be more deeply involved in operational doctrine development. If ACSC is truly going to develop airpower advocates, these steps are essential.

These changes are impossible without help from the profession as a whole. Specifically, Air Force leadership must create the environment where both attending and instructing are sought after objectives. Like “core values”, it must be more than words. As Maj. Gen. I. B. Holley Jr. observed, “The ends we seek are implicit in the means we use.” If leaders don’t act in concert with the reforms they seek then the situation will be much like one Carl H. Builder describes in the *Icarus Syndrome*:

Leaders, by their deeds, may make a mockery of the words. It is the deeds, not the words that ultimately define vision. When the record of the deeds is limited or mixed, it is natural for those who have a stake in the institution and its vision to look to the leadership for clues to their future. If the leadership is perceived to represent special interest within the institution, then those interests, even more than the institution's mission or vision statements, will be seen by many as shaping the future.⁴

This is, however, the situation that we have allowed develop at ACSC. The often-exclaimed role of PME is undercut when, in practice, many of the warrior fields are discouraged to instruct because of the latest ops-tempo factors, or poorly perceived career value.

Now, maybe more than ever, we must reverse this trend. Reductions in force structure, the increasing joint nature of warfare, and the emerging revolution in military affairs, all increase the need for the Air Force to have a credible voice at the operational level of warfare. ACSC is the ideal place to develop this voice. The choice is simple, should the Air Force invest the necessary human capital in ACSC to make it the “pre-war” school that Gen. Fairchild intended? Or, will we allow it to continue on its trend of being a “post war” school? How these questions are answered *with deeds* will have a major impact on the role of airpower in the defense of our nation.

Notes

¹ John W. Gardner, *On Leadership* (New York, N.Y. The Free Press, 1990), 126.

² Lt Gen Jay W. Kelly, “Brilliant Warriors,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 12 (Spring 1996): 104-110.

³ Lewis Ware, “Warriors of the 13th Generation,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 13 (Summer 1996): 10.

⁴ Carl H. Builder, *The Icarus Syndrome: The Role of Air Power Theory in the Evolution and Fate of the U.S. Air Force* (New Brunswick, N.J. Transaction Publishers, 1994), 226.

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